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Which Weapon Do You Choose? (The President's Page)

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Larry L. Lichtenwalter

Yitzhak Rabin wanted to linger, to relish the moment. More than 100,000 supporters had gathered in the Kings of Israel Square in central Tel Aviv on a Saturday night for an upbeat Peace Now rally, celebrating peace with songs and speeches. The enthusiastic crowd waved large banners and balloons.

The 73-year-old prime minister passionately exhorted the crowd to go forward down the road of peace to which he had committed Israel in September 1993. Rabin was clearly exhilarated and buoyed by the outpouring of support and affection. It was one of those rare moments that this battle-hardened warrior, now a soldier of peace, was seen to smile openly and enjoy himself. It was his final glory. Only minutes after the rally ended, two bullets smashed into Rabin. One ruptured his spleen; the other severed major arteries in his chest and shattered his spinal cord. At 11:15 p.m., Eitan Haber, the prime minister's chief of staff, emerged from

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the hospital to scream for all the world to hear: "Rabin is dead!"¹

Our stunned world heard that scream. But reactions were different. Some broke down in tears and anguish. Others rushed out into the streets to dance and celebrate. Sobs and laughter! Once again, our world was confronted with the tortuous quest for peace between warring human beings. We were reminded how divided our human family truly is. How quickly we reach for weapons to defend our ideas, to get our own way, destroy someone we have learned to hate, or get even with someone who has hurt us.

Rabin's assassination forced us to explain the logic of why an assassin slays a man who has abandoned the methods of war, precisely because he has abandoned those methods.² Rabin the soldier had become a man of peace. His perspective on resolving differences had radically changed. He was no longer choosing the weapons of war, but the methods of peace.

The Apostle Paul was familiar

with the kind of weapons or methods we are apt to choose in the interpersonal conflicts we face: "Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does" and that "the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world" (2 Cor. 10:3, 4, NIV).

What kind of war did Paul have in mind? I used to think that this passage was speaking about the church's battle against the kingdom of darkness, or more specifically the individual Christian's struggle with some temptation—especially things of the mind, since Paul went on to assert that we can bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (vs. 5). That was always a good one for a young man dealing with matters of purity. There is some truth, no doubt, to these interpretations, but the context has to do with interpersonal conflicts. Paul was concerned with the strife between people who see things differently, or whose relationship has deteriorated.

Actually, this was a very personal thing, as Paul was defending himself against criticisms and slander that had been hurled nastily toward him and his ministry. Deeply wounded, he felt that he could not ignore these personal attacks. But if he responded to them, he had to do so in a proper way. *The Living Bible* has caught Paul's point the clearest: "I plead gently, as Christ himself would do. Yet some of you are saying, 'Paul's

letters are bold enough when he is far away, but when he gets here he will be afraid to raise his voice!' I hope I won't need to show you when I come how harsh and rough I can be, I don't want to carry out my present plans against some of you who seem to think my deeds and words are merely those of an ordinary man. It is true that I am an ordinary, weak human being, but I don't use human plans and methods to win by battles. I use God's mighty weapons" (2 Cor. 10:1-4).

Interpersonal conflicts. Deteriorating relationships. Paul knew what it was all about. We experience it every day of our lives. Our passage calls it war. We don't often think of it in such radical terms. Human beings clashing in mind and spirit and heart. Wanting things differently. Jockeying for control. The battlefield on which our interpersonal wars are fought is in our homes, our marriages, our churches, the workplace, across the theological landscape. It happens wherever human beings are in contact with one another—even church members, church leaders, and church theologians.

One of the cries the international community heard from the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina during the Balkan War was for the arms embargo to be lifted so they could defend themselves against Serbian aggression. "Just give us the guns, and we'll take care of ourselves," they

cried. Whenever and wherever human beings clash, there is a reaching for weapons. Where there is war, there are weapons.

Paul recognized that there can be strategic choices between weapons. Some weapons, he tell us, are what he calls “*sarkika* weapons” (vss. 3, 4). These are weapons of the flesh, human weapons. The kind of weapons most people naturally reach for when relationships begin to deteriorate. Paul knew firsthand what those kinds of weapons were like. Stones. Whips. Fists. Swords. Clubs. Words. With the Corinthians, those weapons were some pretty nasty things. Like criticism of his lousy preaching, sarcasm about his supposed vacillating personality, insinuations about his ulterior motives, comments about his funny looks.

Each wounded Paul. To paraphrase their harshly critical words: “Sure, he writes tough letters, but when he’s here with you, he’s a wimp! He’s like a barking dog that runs when you get near him” (vs. 1). There was nothing subtle about their accusations: They were charging Paul with cowardice. And there’s more: “Don’t bother about his letters,” some said. “He sounds big, but it’s all noise. When he gets here, you will see that there is nothing great about him, and you have never heard a worse preacher!” (vs. 10, TLB).

Can you imagine how Paul felt

when he heard these things and how much he might have wanted to tell those guys off?

What kinds of weapons do we use to win our interpersonal struggles? Physical force, manipulation, social pressure, gossip and rumor, words of condemnation, name-calling, physical abuse, money, withholding sex, teasing, silence, shaming, shunning, hard-ball politics, one-upmanship, grinding our opponents into the ground with our words so they are left with no dignity, labeling them? These are the kinds of things that crush and sting and discourage and wound deeply. They are more destructive than bullets and bombs.

Worldly weapons are impressive, but Paul says there are more powerful weapons in the Christian’s arsenal. They are weapons in keeping with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. As we have already read from the *Living Bible*, “I don’t use human plans and methods to win my battles. I use God’s mighty weapons.” Paul’s aim was to be compassionate, gentle, mild. He sought to be honest and open (2 Cor. 1:13; 4:2). He sought to be patient and kind (6:6). He made sure he wronged no one, corrupted no one, didn’t take advantage of anyone (7:2). He overcame opposition at Corinth and elsewhere through the spiritual means of intercessory prayer, tearful admonition by his presence and pen, and a character that mirrored the grace and

kindness of Christ.

“Bless those who persecute you;” Paul wrote elsewhere, “bless and do not curse. . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live in peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends. . . . ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:14-21, NIV). Peter affirmed this kind of attitude when he wrote: “All of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it” (1 Peter 3:8-10, NLT).

The weapons we choose reflect whether we have brought every thought of our own captive to Christ. If we use carnal weapons, we have not brought our thoughts captive to Him. We have not been touched by His meekness and lowliness.

During the Peace Now rally in downtown Tel Aviv, Yitzhak Rabin tucked a leaflet with the lyrics to the song *Shir Ha-Shalom*, the *Song of Peace*, into his breast pocket. Caught up in the spirit of the moment, he

sang that song along with the 100,000 who had gathered to celebrate peace and support him. When those two bullets ripped into his flesh, the massive bleeding that resulted drenched the leaflet in blood. Referring to the *Song of Peace*, Shimon Peres said, “He put this song in his pocket, and the bullet went through this song. But the song of peace ringing in our ears will not end.”³

For Yitzhak Rabin, the wages of peacemaking appear simply to be death. But perhaps, as many of us are hoping, a peacemaker’s death can partner peace.

That is the way of Jesus! He was crucified in weakness (2 Cor. 13:4). While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23). “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; Like a lamb he was led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isa. 53:7, NIV). The wages of peacemaking?—death that partners peace.

Love doesn’t always win, but it never loses! So should we be in all of our dealings, especially in very personal realms like theology and life.

REFERENCES

- ¹ *Newsweek* (November 13, 1995): 42; *Time* (November 13, 1995), pp. 61-65.
- ² *Time* (November 13, 1995), p. 56.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.